

State Representative

# David McCluskey

20th Assembly District ★ West Hartford

## 2004 Legislative Report



Dear Neighbors,

What a difference a year makes! In my 2003 end of session report, I detailed the reasons why I voted against that year's budget. Now, I am happy to report that much of the damage in last year's budget has been reversed - cuts to both the ConnPACE and HUSKY programs have been restored in full or in part. In addition, West Hartford is getting an additional \$1.7 million in Educational Cost Sharing (ECS) funds over the '03 amount. This and other monies in the state budget for our town will help relieve our property tax burden. Finally, under the leadership of our State Senator Kevin Sullivan, West Hartford was able to defer our revaluation process for up to three years. This is not a long-term fix to the residential property tax problem, but it will give West Hartford the opportunity to delay the shift in tax burden from our commercial taxpayers to our residential ones. I am hopeful that next year the General Assembly will do more substantial property tax relief, including: the establishment of a homestead exemption for residences as is done in other states; fully-funding the ECS formula at an adequate level; restoring the property tax credit on the state income tax back to its old level.

Of course, the truly historic thing that has occurred since my last legislative report is the inquiry on Governor Rowland. By the time you read this report, new developments will have likely occurred. The allegations against Governor Rowland are serious and substantial, but so is the overturning of an election. Whatever occurs, Connecticut residents must believe that the process is fair and reasonable. I have great confidence in the Representatives serving on the Select Committee of Inquiry. I will often disagree with them on policy issues, but I know that they are persons of good character and integrity who take their charge seriously without partisanship.

This newsletter details some of the legislation I have worked on as well as other items/resources which may be of use to you and your family. As always, please call me at my legislative office: 240-8585 or at home: 521-3554 if you have any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

### Closed Captioning

During this legislative session, I was asked to work with the Deaf and Hearing Impaired Community on the issue of closed captioning of local TV news broadcasts. For many years, the details of real-time natural disasters and other emergencies were not provided in closed captioning to give Deaf residents the same access to vital information as other CT residents. State Representatives Jim Abrams (Meriden), Chris Donovan (Meriden), Andrew Fleischmann (West Hartford) and Tony Guerrera (Rocky Hill) convened several meetings with the Deaf Community and the CT Broadcasters Association and proposed legislation. During these deliberations, it was decided that there must be an ongoing dialogue between representatives of the Deaf Community and of the local TV news stations to monitor the progress of closed captioning of local news and emergencies and to resolve problems. I have been asked to serve as Chair of this group and will work closely with Michael Rice, Executive Director of the Connecticut Broadcasters Association, and Mr. Harvey Corson, Executive Director of the American School for the Deaf, to accomplish this end.



*Rep. McCluskey with Mr. Harvey Corson, Executive Director of the American School for the Deaf.*

## Reforms to State Ethics and State Contract Laws

As a four-year member of the Government Administration and Elections (GAE) Committee, strengthening Connecticut's ethics and contract laws to restore public confidence has been a priority of mine in light of numerous abuses. This year we increased the statute of limitations for filing ethics violation complaints from three to five years, and raised the maximum civil penalty for ethics codes violations from \$2,000 to \$10,000.

Building on the reforms and prequalification process from last year, we made a number of changes to refine the Department of Public Works (DPW) contract selection process and strengthen the contractor evaluations requirement in order to promote fairness and quality construction.

We also clarified the communication prohibition between public officials, state employees and potential contractor bidders if it results in a bidder's receiving inside information other bidders would not receive. The bill disqualifies any bidder who receives confidential or non-public information about an unadvertised contract.

In addition, we addressed bid rigging by lengthening the time from 90 to 180 days for the state to bring an action to void a contract that was entered into in violation of the Code of Ethics. (Public Act 04-38)

The General Assembly also took action to create a more stringent process for a "Fast-Track" or "Emergency No-Bid" project. As of October 1, 2004, any agency that seeks a "fast-track, no-bid" project must certify and document to the GAE Committee that an emergency situation exists that justifies an exception to the typical competitive bid process. If the legislature approves a "fast-track" contract, the State Properties Review Board must also review and approve or disapprove the contract within 30 days. (Public Act 04-141)

### Connecticut Bicycle Map

Bike Maps showing the state's recommended cycling routes are available free of charge from the Connecticut Department of Transportation (DOT). The maps provide both local and cross-state routes and include additional information on cycling in and around the state. David Balzer, the DOT Coordinator, has copies available now for the summer bicycling season.



To request your copy of the Connecticut Bicycle Map, simply send an e-mail with "Bike Map" in the subject line, and your name and mailing address in the text, to David Balzer at [david.balzer@po.state.ct.us](mailto:david.balzer@po.state.ct.us). Or you may write him at CT DOT, P.O. Box 317546, Newington, CT 06131-7546.

### On the Road to Success: A Student Guide to College Funding Available On-line at CSLF.com

The Connecticut Student Loan Foundation (CSLF) recently launched a new, online guide - *On the Road to Success: A Student Guide to College Funding*. This new tool, available at [www.cslf.com](http://www.cslf.com), is an interactive version of CSLF's popular college planning and funding publication and provides important and timely information to students heading off to college this fall including:

- information on the benefits of a college education;
- importance of saving money;
- process of applying for financial aid;
- interactive worksheets and tools explain how to establish and maintain a realistic budget;
- manage student loan and credit card debt.

Tips, like *cheap eats* and *looking good for less*, are scattered throughout the site and provide easy ways to save money while attending college.

"On the Road to Success" is completely integrated with CSLF's site, [www.cslf.com](http://www.cslf.com), which provides additional resources and tools for families, such as the College Aid Calculator and Early College-Cost Estimator. Families can also visit CSLF's college planning and resource site at [www.plan4if.cslf.org](http://www.plan4if.cslf.org).



**For more information,  
for copies of  
2004 Laws Affecting. . .**



**. . . call (860) 240-8585**

## Nurse Staffing

As you may know, there has been an ongoing problem with attracting and keeping nurses in the health profession. In particular, because hospitals may not have enough skilled nurses for their patient load, they have required nurses to work beyond their normal work schedule to provide coverage. If this happens regularly, it can affect patient safety as well as cause nurses

to leave the profession in

order to have some time with their families. This year, Connecticut became one of only a handful of states to prohibit hospitals from requiring nurses to work beyond their work schedule unless there is an emergency (Public Act 04-242). As Vice Chair of the Public Health Committee, I brought the bill out for debate in the House where it passed by a vote of 129-17.

In addition, the General Assembly established a CT Nursing Incentive Program to provide financial assistance to four community-technical colleges to partner with hospitals and other health care institutions to increase nursing faculty and the number of nursing students.



# CAPITOL news

## Healthy Children

In an effort to address the concern of child obesity, the General Assembly passed a bill to encourage healthy eating, exercise and physical activity among students. As of September 1, 2004, any time during the school day when food or drink are for sale, schools are required to make dairy products, including low-fat dairy, water, natural fruit juices and fresh or dried fruit available for purchase. The new law also requires that all full-day students must have at least a twenty-minute lunch break, and students from kindergarten to grade 5 must have a daily period of physical exercise. (Public Act 04-224)

## Great Kids

There is a new resource that provides reliable information about young children (birth to 8 years of age). The website: [www.greatkidsct.org](http://www.greatkidsct.org), developed and maintained by the CT State Library, offers parents and caregivers information about the health, safety, learning and parenting of children. It selects the best available information from national, state and local resources. Go to the site and type in a term (e.g., CHILDCARE, or select a topic from a list of hot topics). Topics covered range from developmental issues (e.g., at what age should my child be toilet trained?) to coping with tragedy, bullying, school testing and childhood diseases. The site also provides links to organizations in the state that offer support for parents and caregivers on a variety of issues.



## Hartford Police Bomb Squad Van

This May, the new Greater Hartford Police Bomb Squad Van was dedicated. The van will serve towns in the Greater Hartford area and is staffed by members of the Hartford, West Hartford and East Hartford Police Departments. The Greater Hartford Police Bomb Squad is one of only a handful in the state and is the primary responder for our area. Several years ago, I was approached by West Hartford resident and law enforcement advocate Barbara Gordon to find funds for a new van to serve the team and transport their bomb robot. Ms. Gordon has been a tireless supporter of state and local police and has fought for equipment needed to perform their job as safely as possible.

In the midst of building the van, the 9/11 tragedy took place and there was need to provide more equipment for the vehicle. I contacted our State Senator, Kevin Sullivan, who was able to obtain the additional dollars.

The new Bomb Squad Van will provide the latest in needed emergency response equipment to a potentially dangerous situation while minimizing the risk to law enforcement personnel.



e-mail: [david.mccluskey@po.state.ct.us](mailto:david.mccluskey@po.state.ct.us)





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## ◆ Information for Seniors ◆

Because of the new Medicare Prescription Discount Cards, many seniors have questions about what they should do and how the benefit works. The CHOICES call line: **1-800-994-9422** is available to answer questions for this complex and evolving program. You may also want to get a copy of the Center for Medicare Advocacy's "CMA Weekly Alert" which provides policy and program updates. You can do this by e-mailing [mshepard@medicareadvocacy.org](mailto:mshepard@medicareadvocacy.org). The Center's website is found at: [www.medicareadvocacy.org](http://www.medicareadvocacy.org). You may also want to get connected to the Elderly Services Division Listserve to receive timely notices and announcements. To sign up, simply send an e-mail to [ctelderlyserv.dss@po.state.ct.us](mailto:ctelderlyserv.dss@po.state.ct.us) and indicate you want to be on the listserve. Finally, you can check out the Department of Social Services ConnPACE website: [www.connpace.com](http://www.connpace.com) for updated application forms and information on how ConnPACE works with the Medicare Prescription Drug Discount Card.

AARP CT has set up a pilot program to identify services that can improve the lives of CT Seniors. The AARP Benefits Outreach CHOICES Program is a fast, free and private Internet screening tool that can help identify programs that pay for such necessities as rent, energy, and food. To learn more about the program or to complete a screening on your own, visit the website at [www.benefitscheckup.org/link/swcaa](http://www.benefitscheckup.org/link/swcaa).

The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services has set up a Home Health Compare Website: [www.medicare.gov/HHCompare/Home.asp](http://www.medicare.gov/HHCompare/Home.asp). For the first time, home health quality measures are available to help consumers choose a home health agency. It is hoped that this resource will allow seniors to make better-informed choices when selecting home health services. You can also go to the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services Website: [www.cms.hhs.gov/hipaa/](http://www.cms.hhs.gov/hipaa/) and then click Quality Initiatives under topics and then click Home Health under Quality Initiatives to get additional information.